

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**Executive Office of the Mayor**

Office of Communications



**PRESS RELEASE**

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY** Thursday, June 20, 2013

**CONTACT:** Doxie McCoy 202.727.9691; [doxie.mccoy@DC.gov](mailto:doxie.mccoy@DC.gov)  
Rob Marus 202.727.6853; [robert.marus@DC.gov](mailto:robert.marus@DC.gov)

**Text as Prepared for Delivery of Mayor Gray's Speech on Next Steps in Education Reform**

*Speech Calls District to Scale Up, Strengthen and Simplify Public Education*

**REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

**"One City, One Goal: The Path Forward to a Quality Education for All"**

**June 20, 2013**

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you for joining us to talk about where I plan to lead the District next as we move urgently forward with implementing education reform in a way that is successful *and* sustainable.

I want to thank our education leaders with us here today – including the D.C. Councilmembers in attendance. Chairman Mendelson and Councilmember Catania, thank you for being here. And Councilmember Catania, thank you also for the energy you've brought to the Council's work on education reform as chair of the Education Committee.

We also have many of the District's other important education leaders here today, including Deputy Mayor for Education Abigail Smith; Interim State Superintendent of Education Emily Durso; D.C. Public Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson; and the Chair and Executive Director, respectively, of our Public Charter School Board, Skip McCoy and Scott Pearson.

I also want to welcome members of the State Board of Education. And we have several top public school leaders in the audience today, from both charter schools and DCPS, alongside leaders in the philanthropic, business, and non-profit communities who share our commitment to public education.

Most importantly, we have the privilege of sharing this moment with students from Savoy Elementary School and from Thurgood Marshall Academy. I want you to know that we are here today because we want to do everything we can for you – and for every student in the District of Columbia – to help you succeed. Thank you, students, for reminding us of our responsibility to help you realize your tremendous promise.

Thank you, Principals Pope and Pardo, for hosting us today. It's no accident that we chose this location to talk about the future of education reform in the District, because Savoy and Thurgood Marshall provide a snapshot of that future. The creative, community-driven partnership between these two schools – one charter, one DCPS – should make us all proud of the direction of education reform in the District. Your spirit of innovation and collaboration is one that we need to replicate across our city.

Now, it wasn't all that long ago that the state of public education in the District looked, frankly, moribund. Our school buildings were crumbling, our textbooks were stashed in warehouses, student outcomes were stagnant – and nobody had enough power to effect meaningful change.

But, 15 years ago, a new idea took hold in the District: find exceptional educators and give *them* the power to design and run their own schools – then hold them accountable for the results. This is when the first public charter schools opened in our city.

Today, Thurgood Marshall Academy stands as an example of what can happen when you give great people the tools to change public education. It's now the District's highest-performing non-selective high school...with a 100 percent college acceptance rate!

And TMA is not alone. Students have enjoyed incredible success at many charter schools across the city. Parents have embraced these options to the extent that, today, 43 percent of our public school students attend a charter.

Now, the rise of charters didn't solve the problem of delivering a quality education to *every* child – but it did show us that significant change is possible when we have the courage to innovate. So in 2007, as Council Chair, I worked with then-Mayor Fenty to take a second bold step forward in how we provide public education in the District. The Public Education Reform Amendment Act, or PERAA, said that no longer would the Chancellor of the D.C. Public Schools fall victim to the micromanagement and politics that had defined the school board. Instead, the Chancellor could focus on the hard work of fixing our schools, with only one boss: the Mayor.

Not long afterward, we took another leap forward in education reform. In 2008, my colleagues on the Council and I passed the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Act. Today, the District ranks ahead of all 50 states in terms of percentage of three- and four-year-olds served, with 70 percent of our three-year-olds and an amazing 92 *percent* of our four-year-olds enrolled in publicly supported pre-K. And we are already seeing the early results of our investment, with 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade students who attended pre-K outperforming their peers who had not attended Pre-K, on the DC-CAS in both math and reading.

So in all of these ways, the District has embraced innovation and operated with urgency. And we have made real progress. Gone are the days of chaos and confusion, when even the on-time opening of schools was not a given. Now, textbooks arrive on time, schools open fully staffed, and teachers and school leaders have clear expectations for success. Overall, public school enrollment is up in the District. And proficiency rates in both sectors have improved.

But we are far from our goal of providing a high-quality education to every child in the District, and not simply to the fortunate few who live in the right neighborhoods, or who are blessed enough to have parents who have figured out how to most successfully navigate the system. Right now, we don't have enough high-quality

programs for everyone. We don't make it easy to find the good ones. And too many students have to travel long distances to access great options.

Indeed, we've passed major legislation and made a number of headline-grabbing changes in public education in the District in the last 15 years. But headlines get you only so far.

Today, we take the next step in our journey to transform public education in the District. Now, the plans and proposals I will share with you may not send out seismic shockwaves or make big headlines – but they will make a real difference to District families and students.

Let me be clear: We've already made revolutionary changes in our public-education system; these were the right things to do. Now we must have the courage of our convictions to stay the course – and the smarts to know when to make refinements and adjustments. To accelerate our progress, we will double down on what we know will result in better outcomes for our students.

I am as impatient as anyone when it comes to the pace of school reform in the District. I also realize that the kind of lasting, sustainable success we are working towards doesn't happen overnight. But it *will* happen. And for it to happen, it is imperative that charters and DCPS collaborate.

I know this is not the narrative to which we are accustomed. The more common perception is that charter schools are taking over, and that DCPS schools are disappearing. We are accustomed to the language of competition, and fixated on whether we are reaching a "tipping point" where neighborhood schools will be a thing of the past. There is a lot of fear in this narrative, and a lot of distrust.

In my State of the District Address earlier this year, I pledged to develop a citywide vision for public education that encompasses both DCPS and charter schools. What I'd like to propose to you today is a vision for education reform in the District that builds systematically on the work that has already been done and leverages the work in both DCPS and charters, in pursuit of great schools for *all* students. This is not about DCPS and charters competing with each other; it is about ensuring that our *children* can compete in the world. And I want to challenge the notion that there is a zero-sum game between the two sectors as we pursue this shared goal.

To achieve our goal, we must *rapidly expand* the number of high-quality school programs for all learners. And today I want to talk about our three overarching strategies for getting there. Each of these strategies is based on what we have heard from members of our public education community and feedback sessions we have held over the past two years:

- First, we're going to **scale up** existing pockets of excellence to serve more students;
- Second, we're going to **strengthen** existing schools and programs to ensure that they provide the highest-quality education to the largest number of students; and
- Third, we're going to **simplify** the way families access all aspects of our education system.

Across all these efforts, we're going to encourage and actualize a new spirit of collaboration and problem-solving that ensures parents and students are first. This vision for public education is not something we can achieve working in isolation *from* one another, or in competition *with* one another. We must see ourselves, as I have said, as One City. Not as proponents of one education reform philosophy over another, not as advocates for charters or DCPS schools, but as residents who are committed to working together to make sure

that every child and every young person in the District gets a quality education. And if we do this well, the result will be growth in both sectors – a system of schools that embraces choice *and* supports strong neighborhood schools. I believe we can and should have both.

Fortunately, we are well-equipped to drive this vision forward with our education team – Deputy Mayor Smith, Chancellor Henderson, Superintendent Durso, and the Public Charter School Board, with strong cooperation from Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, BB Otero, and other government agencies

And from outside government, the Raise DC partnership is working towards a shared set of goals to provide every young person the opportunity for success from cradle to career. I am proud of the role my administration has played in incubating this partnership.

So, using the extraordinary talents of this education team and our community partners, how are we going to **scale up, strengthen** and **simplify** our city's public-education enterprise?

### Scaling Up

We have a number of schools and programs that serve small groups of students well. But not enough. Our first strategy is to *replicate*, or **scale up**, the schools and programs in both sectors that have unlocked the secrets to success and are eager to reach more children.

In an effort to scale up success, DCPS is extending the reach of a number of its highest-performing and most-sought-after programs. McKinley Tech and School Without Walls will be linked to programs that serve elementary and middle school students, so hundreds of younger students can benefit from the strengths of these two high schools. DCPS is also expanding Banneker High School, School Within School, and Capitol Hill Montessori to allow more students across all grade levels to benefit from these highly successful programs.

Another tool that will allow us to quickly expand quality offerings is giving the Chancellor chartering authority. As you know, two weeks ago I sent legislation to the Council to do just that. Chartering authority will allow DCPS to provide existing schools more flexibility to reach their goals, and will give the Chancellor an additional tool to turn around low-performing schools. It will also help DCPS attract proven, high-performing school operators to serve critical gaps in the city.

For our highest-performing charter schools, meanwhile, one of the chief barriers to serving more students is adequate school facilities. Last month, I announced that we will make 12 additional public school buildings available to charter schools for long-term lease. We must allocate these school facilities in a manner that is fair, transparent, and that supports our commitment to rapidly expand the supply of high-quality schools.

As DCPS and charter schools engage in these efforts to scale up, we are convinced we will reach our citywide goals faster if they coordinate their work. To do this, Deputy Mayor Smith is bringing together, for the first time ever, DCPS and the Public Charter School Board to review citywide data on supply, need, and demand – in order to strategically inform their own decisions about school location and programming. By looking together at where in the city there are gaps in quality or quantity, charters and DCPS can make better choices about moving, expanding, opening, and closing particular types of school programs.

## Strengthening

But while we scale up programs that are already incubating excellence, we also have a number of schools or programs that are on the path to improve, or that show early promise. Our second strategy is to *strengthen* their ability to do that more quickly.

While there is promising work happening in both DCPS and charter schools, I want to highlight a number of efforts we are engaged in that involve both sectors.

I spoke earlier about the unparalleled progress we have made as a city in terms of the *number* of students served in publicly funded pre-K. Reflecting the goals of our Early Success Framework, the next phase of this work is to continue to raise the *quality* of our pre-K programs, so that we are getting the most out of our deep investment. My administration has been working to develop two new tools – a revamped Quality Rating Improvement System and a new Kindergarten Entrance Assessment — that will be used to measure how well all of our pre-K programs are serving children, and then help them improve.

Once a child enters school, we have to make sure the school has the basic building blocks for success. I am proud of the fact that the District is leading the nation in its adoption of the Common Core State Standards – a rigorous set of standards for all students that will prepare them for college and careers.

But adopting the Common Core is just the first step. Getting high-quality curricula into the hands of highly qualified teachers so that they can engage students in meaningful ways is the formula for long-term success. To do that, DCPS and charter schools have invested deeply in intensive support for teachers in how to deliver the challenging and rich curricula that the Common Core demands.

This work has provided a wonderful opportunity to share resources across sectors. As part of the District's Race to the Top grant, the Common Core Consortium has brought together teachers from 22 schools – half DCPS and half charters – to build their knowledge and hone their craft as they all transition to the new standards.

For students in high school and beyond, we are investing in strategies to ensure that our students are prepared to succeed in the District's high-demand, high-wage careers. As part of this work, the District's Career and Technical Education Task Force is implementing an ambitious effort to establish National Academy Foundation career academies within DCPS and charter high schools in high-demand fields, aligned closely with our Five-Year Economic Development Strategy. The research is clear: students who attend high-quality career academies have greater high school and college completion rates, employment rates, and career earning rates than their peers who have not.

Strengthening education for high school students also means investing in strategies to ensure students who are falling off-track have access to programs that will help them get back on course.

With a 61 percent citywide high school graduation rate, it is clear that a "one-size-fits-all" high school approach does not work. Instead, we must develop a "pathways" approach to graduation that is tailored to the needs of students. Through the Graduation Pathways Project, Deputy Mayor Smith will be heading efforts in collaboration with OSSE, DCPS, and charter leaders to identify key segments of students who are off-track citywide, to assess the efficacy of current programs to meet the needs of these youth, and to create or expand

programs in both sectors that have demonstrated success at reducing truancy and keeping students on track to graduate on time.

The work we are doing across sectors is not limited to strengthening our general education programs. We are also finding new ways for charter and DCPS schools to improve their special-education delivery. This school year, OSSE implemented an innovative pilot in which both charter and DCPS schools were able to access a consortium of high-quality special education service providers, many of whom work with some of the area's best non-public schools. The initial results of the pilot have been very promising, and OSSE will expand the pilot in the upcoming school year.

Beyond the classroom, we know that it makes a big difference to kids' success when teachers build trusting relationships with families and engage them as partners in their students' academic success. That's exactly what the Flamboyan Family Engagement Partnership helps schools do well, and it's yielding results for students, including increased attendance and better academic performance. This coming school year, this successful partnership will expand to 26 DCPS and charter schools.

Yet another key aspect of strengthening schools is making sure they have the *resources* needed to succeed, no matter what kind of school or program they are.

Deputy Mayor Smith is leading our study of how best to revamp the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula to address the way in which operating expenses are funded for both DCPS and charter schools. This work will be completed in September, and will ensure that all students, regardless of sector, are funded equitably.

In the interest of ensuring that schools are adequately and fairly funded, we are also exploring ways to link LEA payments to enrollment numbers throughout the year. Currently, DCPS is funded based on enrollment projections and public charter schools are funded based on the audited October enrollment count each year. In neither case does funding change during the year as enrollment changes. I've asked Deputy Mayor Smith to examine options for ensuring that funding actually follows students throughout the year in a fair and transparent way, without unduly disrupting school programs during the year.

I have just talked about equity of *resources* – wanting to be sure that all of our public schools and their students have the basic resources they require to achieve. But, I want to take a moment to talk about equity of *service*. Just as we should be responsible as a government for providing resources equitably to all of our public schools, all of our public schools must be responsible for equitably serving all of our students. This means that all schools – DCPS and charter – must embrace their responsibility for serving students with special needs. It means that all publicly-funded schools should meet a high standard for supporting and intervening with a student before long-term suspension or expulsion becomes an option. I applaud PCSB and DCPS for already engaging with each other on this question of equitable service, and I have asked Deputy Mayor Smith to offer her support as they do this important work.

## **Simplifying**

As we increase the number of high-quality offerings for families in the District, we have to make sure families are able to understand and access all aspects of our public-education system. One of the concerns I often hear from parents is that, although we have a vibrant system of public-school choice in the District, our current system for applying to schools is confusing and time-consuming. All charter schools require an application and

administer a lottery. And access to out-of-boundary seats and pre-K seats in DCPS requires the same. Parents spend hours reaching out to individual schools, filling out the same basic paperwork, and going across the city to sign up for lotteries.

Meanwhile, other parents don't understand how the lottery system works and therefore miss out entirely on their chance to participate. Once the lotteries are run and wait-lists established, parents are put in the position of having to hold spots on waiting lists as they attempt to figure out the best options for their children. As a result, schools can't plan or budget effectively for who will actually attend their school in the fall.

We *must* have a simpler process. That's why my administration has been working with charter leaders, DCPS, and the Public Charter School Board to build a single platform where families can learn about and access *all* public-school options. By early 2014, families applying for schools will no longer have to navigate multiple lottery systems. Instead, there will be a common online application and a single lottery for charters and DCPS schools, as well as a common enrollment deadline. This will make applying to schools easier and increase the number of families who get a spot in a school they want, well before the start of school. Through an extensive community outreach effort, we will ensure families understand the process and get support in completing applications.

Our work to simplify the process for getting into a school will go hand-in-hand with our efforts to help families get clear, objective information about schools. Right now, there is no easy way to find comparable information about DCPS and charter schools. Starting this summer, OSSE will release new standardized statewide report cards and school profiles for *all* schools – charter and traditional public schools alike - that will include the same information such as enrollment, graduation rates, and other things that parents need to know in order to make informed choices. The common lottery application will be linked to these school report cards so that families can research and apply to schools in one location.

We also have to simplify the way that youth disconnected from school and from work can re-engage. While multiple District agencies, schools, and non-profit organizations currently provide educational and job-training programs for disconnected youth, there is no single “door” through which young people can connect to appropriate educational options and other services that will help address their individual barriers to academic success, including mental health, housing, and income supports. I have tasked Deputy Mayor Smith, working with Deputy Mayor Otero, with leading the work to develop a blueprint for a Re-Engagement Center that will serve as a focal point for youth who want to reconnect to school. This blueprint will be ready by October 1<sup>st</sup>.

In everything I have described to you today, we are driving towards quality for every child, in every neighborhood. But just as I have heard parents' frustration with the fragmented application process, I have heard other parents say: “I don't want more options. I just want a predictable path of schools in my neighborhood.”

Once again, I want to challenge the notion that there is a zero-sum game between choice and neighborhood schools. I want to ensure that we continue to provide families with options, but that we also have a strong network of neighborhood schools upon which every family can rely, no matter where they live.

A great example of this is the new partnership between Achievement Prep Public Charter School and Malcolm X Elementary School. Starting this fall, students from Achievement Prep and Malcolm X will share a building

and will progress toward a model where the two schools are fully integrated, taking the strength of a neighborhood school and combining it with the innovation of a successful charter.

We must make it easier for charter schools that want to be neighborhood schools. That's why, in the legislation I recently submitted to the Council, I created the *option* for public charter schools to *elect* to provide a neighborhood preference for students surrounding the school. It also enables schools chartered by the Chancellor to become schools of right in high-need neighborhoods. This option provides school leaders with the full autonomy of a charter school while giving families within a specific attendance zone guaranteed access to attend. To me, this is just common sense.

Another way I propose to simplify the process and provide continuity for families is to allow for cross-LEA feeder patterns, where a DCPS school might feed into a charter school, or vice versa. Strategic partnerships to establish cross-LEA feeder patterns will build program continuity for students and predictability for families, cultivate parent involvement to support middle and high schools, and facilitate joint planning and professional development across sectors.

This work will happen in concert with our work to revise DCPS school boundaries. We cannot continue to sustain the convoluted web of school boundaries that has resulted from 40 years of school changes in the District, with no comprehensive redrawing of boundaries. In order for us to be able to focus our efforts and target our investments in high-quality feeder patterns from early childhood to 12<sup>th</sup> grade, we need to have clear boundaries that give families peace of mind and allow us to plan effectively across sectors to ensure that we are providing every child with the opportunity to access quality programs close to home. I have asked Deputy Mayor Smith and Chancellor Henderson to work together to drive the DCPS school-boundary-review process in close collaboration with parents and other key stakeholders. We must tread carefully here, but we must not shy away from the challenge.

## Conclusion

As we enter the next era of school reform in the District, we should be mindful of how far we have come. We have revolutionized the way we think about public schools in our city, and we have revolutionized their governance. Those were the right things to do. Now, we must revolutionize the way we administer these systems, to ensure maximum collaboration and synergy, to rapidly increase the number of high-quality programs accessible to all children, and to tailor these systems to the specific needs of the children and families they serve.

We are One City, and we must have One Goal when it comes to public education: A comprehensive system of schools that provides high-quality options to all children. To accomplish that, we must embrace a spirit of partnership between DCPS and charter schools to take education reform to the next level in the District of Columbia.

Thank you for being here today. I am confident that with all of us working together towards this common goal, we can get this done. Our city and our children deserve nothing less.

###

**Follow Mayor Gray on Facebook and Twitter!**

Follow Mayor Gray on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/MayorVinceGray> and on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/MayorGray>